

# BEYOND SURVIVING

Recovering from Trauma and Suicide:  
Overcoming Vicarious Trauma

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# Typical Personality Characteristics of Victim Services Professionals

- Quick decision maker
- Risk taker
- Extremely dedicated to profession (not a job but a life)
- High tolerance for stress and ambiguity
- Driven by internal motivations
- High personal standards

## ...Continued

- Difficulty accepting “failure”
- Perfectionist
- High level of control  
(self/emotions/situations/families)
- High need for stimulation (busy people/action-oriented)
- Difficulty delaying gratification
- Easily bored
- Strong need to be needed and to help others

# Symptoms of Stress

- ▣ Physical
- ▣ Emotional
- ▣ **Spiritual**
- ▣ Mental
- ▣ Relational

# Signs and Symptoms of Vicarious Traumatization

- ▣ Symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder:
  - Nightmares, sleeplessness, intrusions, avoidance behavior, irritability
- ▣ Denial of client's trauma
- ▣ Over-identification with client
- ▣ No time and energy for oneself
- ▣ Feelings of great vulnerability
- ▣ Insignificant daily events are experienced as threatening
- ▣ Feeling of alienation
- ▣ Social withdrawal
- ▣ Disconnection from loved ones
- ▣ Loss of confidence that good is still possible in the world

## ...Continued

- ▣ Generalized despair and hopelessness
- ▣ Loss of feeling secure
- ▣ Increased sensitivity to violence
- ▣ Cynicism
- ▣ Feeling disillusioned by humanity
- ▣ Disrupted frame of reference
- ▣ Changes in identity, world view, spirituality
- ▣ Diminished self capacities
- ▣ Impaired ego resources

# Symptoms of Trauma Often Experienced After Suicide

- ▣ Shattered sense of order and trust
- ▣ Increased feelings of vulnerability
- ▣ Difficulty sleeping and eating
- ▣ Disorientation – feeling like you are in a fog
- ▣ Flashbacks or intrusive recollections of the trauma
- ▣ Nightmares
- ▣ Uncontrollable crying or intense anger
- ▣ Feeling numb
- ▣ Denial and disbelief

## ...Continued

- ▣ Guilt and self-blame for not being able to prevent the suicide
- ▣ Anger at the person who died, at the world, at God, at yourself
- ▣ Experiencing suicidal thoughts yourself
- ▣ Depression and incredible sadness triggered by anything from major life milestones to a song on the radio



## ...Continued

- ▣ People feel a range of emotions in the aftermath of suicide – not everyone will go through all of these experiences and the length of each may differ, but these are common emotional reactions that often come like a tidal wave unexpectedly and repeatedly.

# EFFECTS OF TRAUMA WORK ON THERAPIST/CAREGIVER

## PERVASIVE

Affects all realms of person's life

## CUMULATIVE

Each trauma victim can reinforce gradual  
change of schemas

## PERMANENT

Even if worked through, experiences leave scars

# Compassion Fatigue (Vicarious Trauma) Self-Test

Consider each of the following characteristics about you and your current situation. Write in the number for the best response. Use one of the following answers:

- 1 = Rarely/Never
- 2 = At Times
- 3 = Not Sure
- 4 = Often
- 5 = Very Often

# Scoring Instructions

Make sure you have responded to ALL questions.

Next, circle the following 23 items: 1-8, 10-13, 17-26, and number 29.

Now ADD the numbers you wrote next to the items circled.

Note your risk of Compassion Fatigue.

|                    |                            |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>26 or LESS=</b> | <b>Extremely low risk</b>  |
| <b>27 to 30 =</b>  | <b>Low risk</b>            |
| <b>31 to 35 =</b>  | <b>Moderate risk</b>       |
| <b>36 to 40 =</b>  | <b>High risk</b>           |
| <b>41 or more=</b> | <b>Extremely High risk</b> |

# ...Continued Scoring Instructions

To determine your risk of **Burnout**, ADD the number you wrote next to the items NOT circled.

Note your risk of Burnout

|            |   |                     |
|------------|---|---------------------|
| 19 or less | = | Extremely low risk  |
| 20 to 24   | = | Low risk            |
| 25 to 29   | = | Moderate risk       |
| 30 to 42   | = | High risk           |
| 43 or more | = | Extremely high risk |

# Signs and Symptoms of Burnout

- ▣ Apathy
- ▣ Feeling of hopelessness
- ▣ Rapid exhaustion
- ▣ Disillusionment
- ▣ Melancholy
- ▣ Forgetfulness
- ▣ Irritability
- ▣ Experiencing work as a heavy burden
- ▣ Alienated, impersonal, uncaring and cynical attitude towards clients
- ▣ Tendency to blame oneself
- ▣ Feeling of failure

# Assessing Self-Care

Rate the following areas of frequency

|   |   |                         |
|---|---|-------------------------|
| 5 | = | Frequency               |
| 4 | = | Occasionally            |
| 3 | = | Rarely                  |
| 2 | = | Never                   |
| 1 | = | It never occurred to me |

- ▣ **Physical Self-Care**
- ▣ **Psychological Self-Care**
- ▣ **Emotional Self-Care**
- ▣ **Spiritual Self-Care**
- ▣ **Workplace or Professional Self-Care**
- ▣ **Balance**
- ▣ **Other Areas of Self-Care that are Relevant to You**

Love thy neighbor as thyself...  
Matthew 22:39b

We can only help others if we  
have helped ourselves!

